
A VISIT TO PENSHURST.

“ _____ Home of my fathers !
Surely, a spirit in these chambers dwells,
Which hears, and answers, to my secret sigh !”

A young companion and myself entered the hall of the mansion.—It was ruinous, chill, and deserted. The walls were mildewed ; and disfigured, in places, by a fading kind of painting, representing pillars in perspective, done about a century, at the suggestion of bad taste, as if any scenic deception could add to the real grandeur of the home of the Sidneys.

The minstrel-gallery, of a vast extent, and venerable by the ideas connected with its past uses, was dilapidated, dark, and hung with cobwebs. The banners of the Sidneys were gone : those banners, which had three times waved over the heads of British sovereigns entering there.—First, Edward VI., smiling in youthful goodness, and happy in a recent act of grateful

affection to a faithful servant, when he bestowed that Penshurst on Sir William Sidney. Then, the royal Elizabeth, when her train of lords and ladies, like the fabled court of Gloriana, queen of fairy-land, swept along in all their splendour, bending their plumed and crested brows, under the gallery-canopy. And, lastly, when the unhappy Charles, with a melancholy step (as if he presaged, that his two infant children would one day tread the same pavement, weeping prisoners) entered the hall, and looking up at that bannered gallery, he pointed out to his eldest son, the Prince of Wales, who was walking at his side, the armour of the hero of Zutphen, which then stood there, the proudest trophy amongst many honoured. The red cloak, in which the bleeding hero had been carried from that fatal field, was in good preservation, and mantled the armour. A brother's tears had often wept over it. That "Sweet Robin!" to whom so many of Sir Philip Sidney's affectionate fraternal letters, yet extant, are addressed. The trophy is now a heap of rusted iron, and the mantle, a fringe of dusky tatters. But it was otherwise, when the royal Charles stopped before it, and remarked to the Prince, who was pressing on to pay his gallant court, perhaps, to the lovely and noble group in the family saloons above:—"Look there, my son!" said the King, "when the hero who wore it died, he bade those who stood around him, *Behold the end of all human vanity! There is nothing of worth to me, now*, added he, *but my faith in the truth of the holy scriptures: fame, honours of the world! I have had enough of these; and, see their end!—A common winding-sheet!*"

"And yet," observed the Prince, when his royal father paused, "was not Sir Philip Sidney justly the boast of England? I cannot understand such absurd disqualifying of a man's own merits." Charles replied: "Not so absurd, my son. What does our king of poets tell us? *It is the surest witness still of excellency, to put a strange face on its own perfections!* And who would shew the treason to contradict Dan Shakspeare?" asked the monarch, pensively smiling. The Prince shook his head: "I am not convinced yet," he answered; "a clever fellow must always be conscious of his worth, and I like him

the better for honestly saying so."—"Many a clever man over-rates his own value," returned the King; "and, depend on it, Charles, that the highest-minded men have the humblest opinion of themselves. Ordinary faculties measure themselves with those around themselves; the noblest looks up to the source of excellence, and bows its humbled head to the ground before Almighty perfection!"—"Your Majesty is turned Archbishop, this morning!" exclaimed the Prince, rather too saucily to deserve the smile of pardon with which his royal father patted him on the shoulder, and gently answered, "May be I have borrowed a little of his Grace of Canterbury's good lessons; and, while my mitre is on, I will give you an abiding text, by which, as Prince or peasant, every Christian man ought to guide his life:—*This is it—Do your duty to your fellow-creatures; and be lowly in your own eyes, before Him who made them and yourself!* Whatever men think they do, more than their duty, comes of vanity; and, therefore, it is worthless. Pride neutralizes virtue." What response the young Prince made, I never heard; but when myself and my companion gazed on that same trophy, which had elicited King Charles's remark, and which we almost fancied we saw stained with the noble blood which had flowed from under it when the gallant wearer fell, we both sighed, the youth very deeply. At the moment, we heard steps, probably the entrance of more visitors, drawn by the usual curiosity of seeing the old places around, from Tonbridge Wells; and putting my arm through that of my young friend, we proceeded together to the dwelling apartments, large, and long enough, some of them, for galleries.

In the first of them, we encountered the old housekeeper of the then, for years, deserted mansion. She curtsied, and with the volubility of the exhibiter of an itinerant *galante-show*, began running over the names of the personages whose fading pictures hung on the mildewed walls.—We were struck with the portraits of two children, a boy and a girl; and interrupting the good woman's breathless catalogue, I pointed to these, disposed in a different quarter from that she was describing, and asked who they were.

"La! bless you, gentlemen!" cried she, "they be the very moral likenesses of the Duke of Gloucester, and the Princess Elizabeth! Heaven rest them, poor things, they had enow o' sorrow in this wicked world, though they were great folks. When those terrible roundheaded rebels, Oliver, and Cromwell, cut off the crowned head of the King their father, the poor things were brought to this house by its honoured lady then, and nursed up, just as if they had been her own."

The worthy dame told her story with so serious an interest, wiping her eye with the corner of her apron, that I was mischievous enough to ask her, as gravely, "If she remembered the *poor things*?"—She stared at me, as if she thought my head was not quite in its right place; and turning from me, shaking her grey locks, as if she thought that I, too, was "a poor thing!" she took my companion by the sleeve, and whispered him (his eyes being also bent on the two portraits), "There!" said she, "you may well look so pitifully on the sweet young Princess, for she was sadly treated, they say; but the folk that saw it are dead and buried long before I was born!" and the good dame glanced aside at me, with a certain air of reproach, as if "Her charms of beauty she remembered yet;" and *old age*, she knew, was a sad blotter out of its visible memorials. The youth replied, that he was aware the young Princess had fully shared her royal parent's miseries, yet generally, history said little of the particulars. "Ah!" cried the venerable narrator, "there was a power of evil, sure enough; and all dark ways, just like the father of evil. The poor thing, I have heard my grandmother say, who was still-room maid here at that time, was took away by a black ruffian in a mask, one fearful stormy night, out of the very arms of my Lady Sidney; and the man shut her up in a great dark castle, in a lonesome uninhabited island in the midst of the sea, called the *White*, because it lies altogether like a dead corpse in a shroud. And so that pretty creature, all alone, died there; and is buried, my grandmother said, where the sea washes over her grave twice in the year; that is, on the day his royal Majesty, her father, had his head cut off by two men in a mask, Oliver

and Cromwell; and on the day year, when the child herself was found sitting, starved to death, at the brink of a deep well, in the old castle, when her strength was so gone she could not draw herself a draught of water. Folks call the place *Care's Brook*, ever since."

"Poor, poor victim, of hypocrisy and treason!" exclaimed her attentive auditor, and as pathetically as if he believed every iota of her strangely-jumbled story. But, indeed, the particulars were in general so true, though so absurdly put together, that I could not but also look on the sweet little Princess's infant face, with a pity yearning at my own heart, as if she even then lived and suffered. "What do you know of her brother, dame?" inquired the youth; "I should like to hear your version of his sad history too."—"Why, Sirs," replied she, bridling and spreading her apron with a curtsy of smiling self-complacency, observing that I, too, with a respectful air, drew near to listen:—"He grew a great gentleman, after he had been as sorely beset, almost, as his poor sister; and had a mighty hand, my grandmother said, in bringing back his brother, the merry Prince Charles, to be King over all England. Then there were grand days; there were feastings in the hall night and day; and such dancings and revellings in the buttery-hatch, as would have done your hearts good to have seen. But mournings came after, for, lack-a-day! the young Duke died of a broken heart, for love of Countess Sidney's beautiful daughter, the Lady Dorothy, who all the fine court gentlemen were right mad about. She hangs there, Sirs, just under King Charles on horseback."

We turned and saw a small picture, of the cabinet size, of the famous Sacharissa, in very good preservation. "I could have fallen in love with that sweet face, myself!" cried I. The old crone tossed her head, at this ejaculation, as scornful as the lady herself might have done.—"Marry!" cried she, "nobody durst look even at her, but lords and princes; and one of them, the biggest of all for riches and royalties, who came from a far country, where there is summer all the year, and you may pluck ripe oranges as plenty as crab apples; and who never spoke to her but in fine verses, and would have

made her queen over all his grandeur, such as nobody ever heard of before, if she would but have smiled on him. But she said nay to him too; so he sailed away, grieving, not worth the bread he eat, and some think he was drowned, for he was never heard of more!"

"Why, Goody!" returned I, "thou art the very minstrelless of the past ages! the glee-woman of *Dainty Devices*, one of whose legends was worth a whole score of our modern romances, male or female! Now tell me, what became of the proud beauty?" The dame again stared at me; not very well understanding my intended compliment to her most imaginative memory; but, after a moment's pause, as soon as my companion repeated my question, she replied to him rather than to me. "Why, Sir, she married a great, great person, far higher than any King or Duke, they say, called a *hero*! He came from a grand country, too, my grandmother told me, where all the coals in the world are brought in ships: but, dearie me! he was killed somehow, and the poor lady never looked up again!"—"Bravo!" cried I, clapping my hands at this *dénouement*. "No; not *bravo*," answered she, with the most genuine simplicity; "I said *Hero*! that was his grand title. But there are none such great folks left now a-days; so I don't wonder you never heard of the name before." This was so irresistible, that I burst into a peal of laughter; which, however, was soon checked into something of order, by my perceiving a grave looking gentleman, but with a particularly benign countenance, join our party, by pushing wholly open, and coming forth, a small ante-room door, that had been standing ajar. The old housekeeper curtsied reverentially to him, and silently drew back into a corner of the apartment, while he approached as if to speak to us.

"I have heard our good dame's wonders!" observed he, with a smile; "but as you, gentlemen, appear really interested in the personages of whom her tale, like a broken picture on glass of a true subject, reflects so many ill-assorted fragments, allow me, a sort of heir-loom, which occasionally haunts this house," and he smiled again, but mournfully—

"not to correct her historical mistakes, for that your own well-read knowledge as Englishmen, must have done for yourselves; but to point out some particularly worthy objects of your attention, which, otherwise, might have escaped your notice."

We were rejoiced at this valuable rencontre; and bowing, with expressions of gratitude, to the friendly stranger, passed with him into the interior apartment. In brushing by the *grooming gown* of our late female Cicerone, I slid a little *golden thanks* into her hand; and now, indeed, she curtsied even to the floor, half whispering—"Heaven bless your honour." She looked at the moment, as if that *sovereign* might have bought me as relenting a smile from the sweet lips of the lofty Lady Dorothy.

In that private chamber, for we understood it was not generally exhibited to common visitors, our new conductor shewed to us a very interesting portrait of the accomplished, and eminently pious, *Languet*. He was the chosen monitor of Sir Philip Sidney, also the most revered confident of his inmost thoughts; and, as we studied the beneficent, as well as intelligent lines of the fine countenance, we both exclaimed—"Such would have been the friend I would have selected!" The stranger told us, that there were yet extant, but very rare to be met with, a series of letters which passed between *Languet* and the young Knight of Penshurst; they were as incomparable for grace of style, and purity of sentiment, as the characters of the correspondents. We were then led to a small picture of the Countess of Pembroke, the sister of Sir Philip; the beloved sister, for whom he wrote "*The Arcadia*," and she held a volume in her hand, labelled with that title.* She was a

* "The modernization of the *Arcadia*, by Mrs. Stanley," observes a contemporary critic, "has little to recommend it. With most meritorious industry she has managed, with its occasional quaintnesses and conceits, to remove all the charms of diction and freshness of expression, which the work itself possessed, and to convert the felicitousness and force of its language, into prettiness and insipidity. Such transmutations of the original productions of genius, such meltings down of the massive gold of our ancestors for the

fair creature, with blue eyes and light golden hair.—“A thousand to one, more beautiful than Saccharissa!” exclaimed my young companion. “I certainly think, incomparably more lovely!” rejoined our friend; “here is so much gentleness, softness, goodness; all the dove! and that was this noble lady’s character. It was for her, that her brother, so worthy of her, translated the Psalms of David from the original Hebrew into English verse.” We both rather marvelled at Sir Philip, a soldier, and a gallant courtier, being conversant with so erudite a language. “It was also a holy language!” replied the stranger, and all that belonged to the sanctuary was dearer to him than either courts or camps.” I inquired if it were possible now to get a sight of the translation he had made: had it been printed? He answered, that he believed no part of it had ever been put to press, excepting that exquisitely-pathetic psalm, “By the waters of Babylon,” which Addison quotes, as a specimen of this admirable translation, and gives in a page of “The Spectator.” My young companion remembered having seen it there; but for myself, with shame I confessed, I had either passed it over, when I read the book as a boy, or, which was worse, had totally forgotten it.—“But is the MS. in this house, Sir?” eagerly inquired the enthusiastic youth.—“No;” replied our friend:—“It was the property of the descendants of Lady Pembroke; and it was long preserved at Wilton, as a jewel beyond all price; but (and the colour flushed suddenly in the speaker’s face) some base wretch, out of the many applicants, whom the present too easy Lord permitted to study the old documents in his library

purposes of modern frippery, have much of bad taste in them, if not something of profanation. They resemble, in the boldness of their attempts and the weakness of their execution, the impotent endeavours of the modern Greeks, to repair the mighty monuments of their forefathers’ power and politeness; ‘who,’ to use the words of a great author, ‘can do no more for the preservation of those admirable specimens of art, than to whitewash the Parian marble with chalk, and encrust the porphyry and granite with tiles and potsherds.’”

there, purloined the precious bequeathment; and no search, or offered rewards, could ever recover it again.”

There was something in the manner of the speaker, that instantly struck me he must be that very too-easy, because too-confiding nobleman, himself; and I believe my gaze told him what was in my thoughts, for with evident promptness to turn the current of them, he opened a little locked drawer in a small cabinet, and taking out a time-seared sheet of paper, handed it to me, saying, “Here is a copy, distinctly in the writing of Sir Philip’s own penmanship, of the celebrated prayer he wrote for a noble lady in sorrow and captivity; and which our unhappy Charles I. transcribed into the manuscript book of his daily prison devotions. I took it, and read as follows:—

“O, all-seeing Light, and eternal Life of all things, to whom nothing is either so great, that it may resist, or so small, that it is contemned, look upon my misery with thine eye of mercy, and let thine infinite power vouchsafe to limit out some proportion of deliverance unto me, as to thee shall seem most convenient. Let not injury, O Lord, triumph over me; and let my faults by thy hand be corrected; and let not mine unjust enemy be the minister of thy justice. But yet, my God, if in thy wisdom this be the aptest chastisement for my unexcusable folly; if this low bondage be fittest for my over-high desires; if the pride of my not-enough humble heart, be thus to be broken, O Lord, I yield unto thy will; and joyfully embrace what sorrow thou wilt have me suffer. Let them (if so it be good unto thee) use me with more and more punishment: but, blessed Father of all, let never their wickedness have such hand, but that I may carry a pure mind, in a pure body, through life unto death, wherever the grave of affliction may be prepared for me.”

This was indeed a text on which we conversed during the whole of our passage through the remainder of the apartments, shedding, as it were, a soft religious light over all. The impression yet abides with me.

P. J.